

War and reconstruction in Iraq pay off for America

Despite an unrelenting drumbeat of negative news, Iraqis and coalition forces make substantial progress in freedom, safety, health and development

By U.S. Rep. Joseph Knollenberg

Three months of relentlessly negative media coverage of the situation in Iraq may have left many here wondering whether our efforts in Iraq were really worth it.

While there were and are legitimate issues in Iraq to be covered by the media that may not put our country in the best light, that unrelenting drumbeat of negativity has obscured and ignored the substantial progress that has been made.

There are still many challenges, but as the turnover of sovereignty to the interim Iraqi government has been completed, it is appropriate to look again at why we are in Iraq. To answer that, we must ask two questions: Because of our efforts in Iraq, is the United States more secure, and are the Iraqi people better off?

Let's be clear — Saddam Hussein and his regime were a destabilizing force in an unstable region. They clearly harbored hostile intentions against the United States, invaded two other countries, used biological and chemical weapons against the Iranians and Kurds, harbored known terrorists, financially rewarded homicide

bombers in Israel, refused to comply with United Nations mandates and on and on.

We could no longer turn a blind eye. There was no better choice but to oust Saddam and no other country capable.

Yes, it is indisputably better for the United States that Saddam Hussein is no longer in power.

This leads to the second question: Are the Iraqi people better off?

While the threat of terrorist attacks remain, Iraqis no longer have to live in fear of a regime that murdered hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Iraqis during its reign of terror. That alone makes the situation better.

But the improvements go beyond that. All 22 universities and 43 technical institutes and colleges are open as well as all 240 hospitals and more than 1,200 health clinics.

We have helped rehabilitate more than 2,500 schools. The country's infrastructure, neglected for decades under Saddam, is being rebuilt. Iraqi oil is filling the country's coffers, not building palaces. There is an endless list of achievements.

You don't have to take my word



Khalid Mohammed / Associated Press
Vendors sell bootleg CDs in Baghdad, Iraq, including one of the July 1 video trial hearing of Saddam Hussein. The CDs, part of the country's growing marketplace, sell for 78 cents each.

for it. In fact, you can read many first hand accounts of the situation in Iraq from Iraqis themselves on their Internet blogs.

The authors of these blogs speak frankly about the challenges and struggles they face every day living in Iraq. But they also write with an optimism and hope about the future of

plunk down one or several million dollars for a romantic Southern getaway under the moonlight and the magnolias. They appreciate the ornate moldings and opulent woodwork, as well as the proximity to beaches and deluxe shopping.

Where are the deed holders? Possibilities include their primary residence in Connecticut, their second home in Costa Rica, a South Pacific cruise or an African safari. The oddest thing, locals say, is that the more expensive the house, the less time people seem to spend in it. This may be urban legend, but

Iraqi views online
One of the most well-known Iraqi blogs can be found at <http://iraqthemodel.blogspot.com>. This also has links to other Iraqi blogs.

not been scared away. Iraqi-Americans are actively working on a large-scale program to promote goodwill in Iraq. They have confidence that they and their fellow Iraqis will succeed in creating a safe, free and democratic Iraq. I'm proud to be working with this group, and I hope more will join to make this program a success.

Questioning some of our strategic decisions and other actions in Iraq is not a bad thing. It is the sign of the healthy democracy that we have in our country.

Mistakes have been made (in fact, it's hard to envision a scenario where mistakes wouldn't be made), but goals have been realized as well.

As power is turned over to the interim Iraqi government, we must also see that our efforts and sacrifices there are worthy of our great nation.

face a depopulation problem to some extent. If they are near bustling commercial centers, the districts may have more full-time residents, but even these people usually have few if any children.

The pre-automobile-age intimacy that attracts single professionals and childless couples often seems a gross inconvenience to families. They don't want to put up with the small backyards, dearth of minivan parking and schools that are more than parlors. So they move off to the suburbs.

opening off an enormous kitchen.) This is a tough problem to fix. It takes money and a certain amount of idealism to preserve and live in a historic structure. And as the public recognizes the unique beauty of historic districts, the prices of their houses can soar past the pocketbooks of most families.

For cities and towns that have survived the ages, having a once-bustling neighborhood turn into a seasonal resort represents a kind of cultural deficit. Much has been said about how poverty saps the heart of a neighborhood. Wealth, clearly,

Communities fight problem of well-kept, but empty historic homes



FROM HARBO

It was the weirdest thing. Not a leaf of peeling paint marred the renovated houses in Charleston, S.C.'s fabled historic district. Teams of weed inspectors seemed to crawl over the gardens

with tweezers. In preservation terms, the neighborhood south of Broad Street approached perfection. Only one thing was missing: inhabitants.

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